



Education System Brief:

Zambia



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1. EDUCATION SYSTEM: OVERVIEW

1.1. STRUCTURE



Pre-Primary Education

Grades: 0 Age: 3-6

Early Childhood Education (ECE) is optional and enrollment is low at around 10-12% of 6-year-olds (2015).

Most ECE-centers are in urban areas and 80% are privately owned charging substantial fees. This leads to unequal access: Children from wealthy backgrounds are nearly 7 times as likely to obtain formal ECE.

Recent efforts have aimed at broadening access through building public ECE-centers concentrated in rural areas. Since 2010, Zambia has thus experienced a slight upward trend in ECE take-up.

Primary School

Grades: 1–7 Age: 7–13

Primary education for all 7-13 year-olds is compulsory in Zambia and the country has managed to reach near to full enrollment (98.72% in 2017).

Although the Zambian government committed to provide free access to primary education in 2002 the grants awarded to schools are hardly sufficient to cover operational costs: 55% of primary schools still charge fees, although payments are not enforced. In addition, hidden fees such as expenses for school books and uniforms are charged.

Since 2017, primary education up to Grade 4 is held in children's native languages. From Grade 5 onwards, English is the language of instruction.

Several government bursaries are available every year to support individuals in gaining access to education. However, since the introduction of free primary education, the focus of financial support has shifted to secondary education.

Grade 7 Composite Examination

Junior Secondary School

Grades: 8–9 Age: 14–15

Attending Junior-Secondary School is optional. Due to scarce capacities, Grade 7 exam results determine whether a student can progress to Junior Secondary School.

Although the Government has expressed the long-term goal of free secondary education, public funding currently only covers about 10% of school expenses, the remaining 90% come from tuition fees. Government guidelines for secondary schools advise that school fees should be between 780 and 2150 Zambian Kwacha (ZMW) in day schools and between 1,750 to 2,950 ZMW for boarding schools. These fees mark considerable barriers for children from poor families.

As part of the government's keeping girls in school program, large-scale bursary support is available to girls from vulnerable backgrounds to encourage the transition to secondary education. In addition, a growing number of other bursaries have become available in recent years with roughly 1 out of 20 students in secondary education receiving a bursary in 2015.

Since the curriculum reform in 2013, students can choose between an academic and vocational pathway in secondary school.

Grade 9 Junior Secondary School Leaving

Senior Secondary School

Grades: 10–12 Age: 16–18

Attending Senior Secondary School is optional, and progression is contingent on Grade 9 Exam results. Fees usually range from 780-2,150 ZMW for day schools and 1,750-2,90 ZMW for Boarding schools.

Grade 12 School Leaving Examinations

Higher Education



Vocational Training (TEVET)

Higher education can be pursued at a hand full of public and several private universities, colleges, and teacher training colleges. Graduates obtain Diplomas, Bachelor’s, Post-Graduate Diplomas, Master’s, or PhDs (level 6-10 on [Zambia Qualifications Framework](#)). The [Higher Education Authority](#) was established to accredit programs and validate qualifications.

The costs of higher education are currently covered by both government funding and tuition fees as well as revenue generation through consulting and research services is lagging.

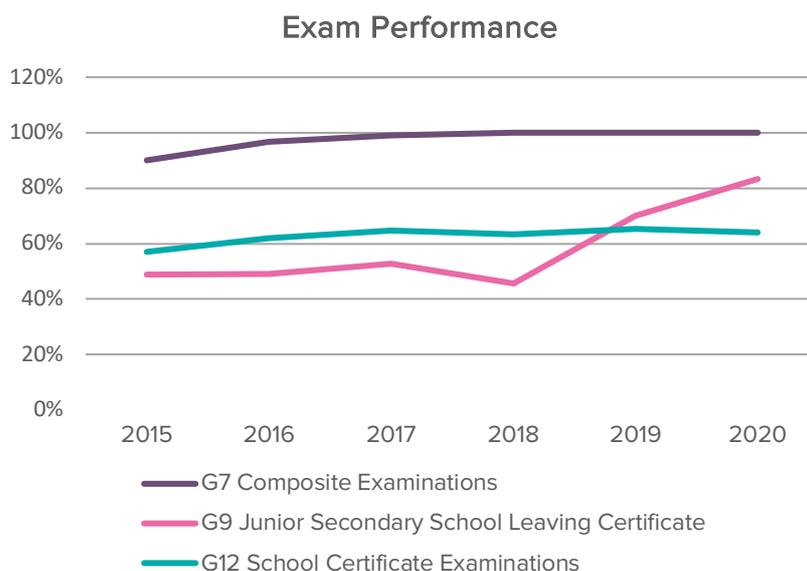
Alternatively, vocational training can be pursued at largely autonomous Technical Education, Vocational and Entrepreneurship Training (TEVET) Institutions which allow candidates to obtain trade tests, craft certificates, or diplomas (level 3-6 on Zambia Qualifications Framework).

Recent policy focus has been to strengthen vocational training to enhance the skill sets in the economy and provide an alternative to the competitive academic pathway. As part of this ambition, the [Technical Education, Vocational, and Entrepreneurship Training Authority \(TEVETA\)](#) was established in 2005 to coordinate and supervise autonomous training institutions.

Nonetheless, vocational training remains underfinanced with only 0.8% of government expenditure allocated to TEVET and thus relies on private sector contributions.

1.1. EXAMINATIONS

Centralized high-stake examinations administered by the [Examinations Council of Zambia](#) take place in grades 7, 9, and 12 and cover a broad range of subjects. Exam performance has continuously improved over the past 5 years.



Progress to the next level of education is contingent on exam performance. Those who fail exams on the first attempt can take the General Certificate of Education (GCE) and retake it multiple times.

In addition, the Examinations Council of Zambia holds low stake exams – [The National Assessment Survey](#) – in Grade 5 for evaluation purposes.

1.2. CURRICULUM

Zambia introduced a new learner-centered [curriculum](#) in 2013 with the ambition to create an interlinked and holistic learning experience from early childhood to the tertiary level.

Early Childhood Care

Early Childhood Education aims to develop the following skills:

- Social interaction skills
- Elementary pre-literacy skills
- Elementary pre-numeracy skills
- Fine and gross motor skills

Primary Education

The new primary curriculum aims to build foundational skills through the usage of a local language for instruction in the first 3 years of schooling and an Early Grade Literacy program.

- Literacy Skills in English and a Zambian Language or Sign Language
- Numeracy Skills
- Information and Communications Technology Skills
- Life skills

Junior Secondary Curriculum

At this level, learners can choose between an academic and several vocational pathways (Agriculture, Technology, Performing and Creative Arts, Physical Education and Sports, Home Economics and Hospitality). The curriculum focuses on the following competencies:

- Communication Skills
- Mathematical Skills
- Information and Communications Technology Skills
- Scientific Skills
- Pre-Vocational and Life Skills

Senior Secondary Curriculum

In Senior Secondary school, learners continue to specialize in their respective pathway. On the Academic track, students now face a choice between business studies, social or natural sciences. On each pathway, core subjects are taught along a selection of optionals to promote the following competencies:

- Communicating effectively in both speech and writing
- Understanding, interpreting, and applying mathematical, scientific, and technological concepts
- Applying the knowledge, skills, positive attitudes, and value systems of vocational and life skills in real life

2. EDUCATION SYSTEM: REGULATORY FRAMEWORK & PROVISION

2.1. GOVERNANCE

The Zambian education system is highly centralized but has been subject to decentralization policies over the past decade. These reforms gave rise to a governance structure that involves both national and regional agencies.

National Level

Institutions:

1. Ministry of General Education (MoGE) - ECE, primary and secondary education
2. Ministry of higher education (MoHE) - tertiary education, vocational training, technology, and innovation

Responsibilities:

- Drafting legislative proposals, developing policies & formulating national plans
- procuring and allocating resources
- developing curricula, setting national standards & and conducting monitoring and evaluation

Regional Level

Institution: 10 provincial Education Offices

Responsibility: Coordinative tasks

Local Level

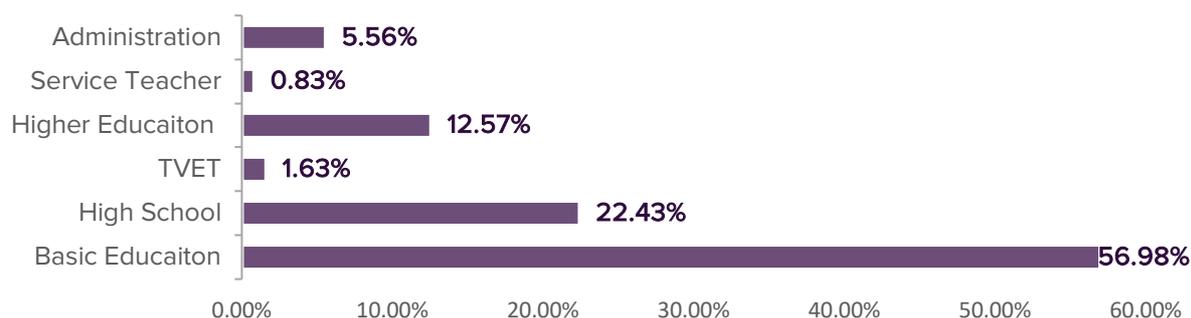
Institutions: District Education Board Secretaries & Secondary School Education Boards

Responsibility: Delivery of Education Services and managing school institutions

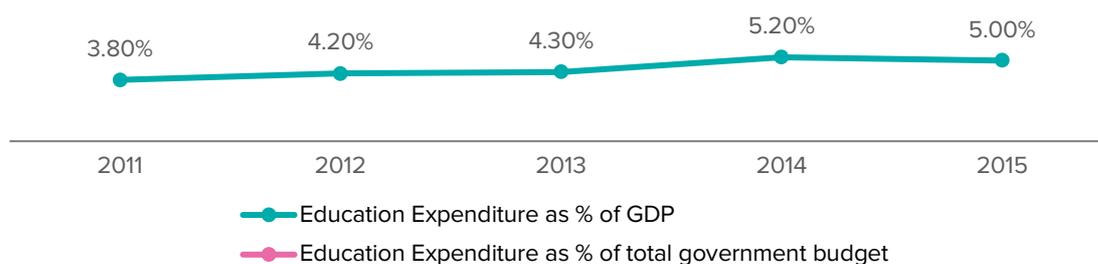
Public expenditure on education amounts to 5% of the national GDP and 20.2% of government spending. Zambia thus lies within the recommended range of education spending identified by the world education forum in the [Incheon Declaration](#).

Out of these expenses, 80% go to the MoGE and 20% are spent on higher education. Basic Education is by far the **biggest cost point**, followed by upper secondary and higher education.

Education Spending



Government Spending on Education



2.2. QUALITY ASSURANCE

The [Education Act](#) outlines the format of school inspections which are managed by the Ministry of Education. The government has expressed the [goal](#) to conduct school inspections at least twice a year in all grant-aided, community, and private schools.

Primary and early childhood teachers should complete a three-year pre-service training at a teachers’ college including both pedagogical and subject-based elements. Further, universities run four-year degree programs to train teachers for secondary education. However, the shortage of qualified teachers often results in the employment of unqualified or even entirely untrained teachers. 45% of primary school teachers have only completed a 2-year certificate of education and 1.7% have not received any pre-service training.

2.3. PRIVATE SECTOR

Next to public schools, Zambia has several non-state education providers. There are no restrictions on the type of organization or individual who can set up and operate a school except for proof of land ownership. Private schools vary in their relation to the government depending on whether they receive government subsidies.

Government-funded

Community Schools

Community schools make up for the largest part of non-state schools. Originally founded to deliver local and affordable primary education to the poor, these schools are run by parents, teachers, and local communities. These schools are recognized by and collaborate with the government.

Share: 23.8% of primary schools

Relation to government:

- receive subsidies from the government for running the school (no start-up funding).
- report to the government on the spending of public funds.
- pay a fee to apply for aided status.
- undertake regular government inspection.
- adopt curriculum, centralized exams, books, and guidelines on teaching material from ministry.
- **MoGE can dismiss teachers and has a substantial influence on staffing decisions.**

Grant-Aided Schools

Grant-aided schools are managed by private individuals and are run on a government grant

Share: 2.6% of primary schools

Relation to government:

- receive subsidies from the government for running the school (no start-up funding).
- report to the government on the spending of public funds.
- pay a fee to apply for aided status.
- MoGE can dismiss teachers and has a substantial influence on staffing decisions.
- undertake regular government inspection.
- adopt curriculum, centralized exams, books, and guidelines on teaching
- **can employ and dismiss their teachers.**

Privately-funded

Independent Private Schools

Independent private schools are owned by religious organizations, individuals, or groups and do not receive funds from the government. These schools are typically the most expensive.

Share: 3.3%

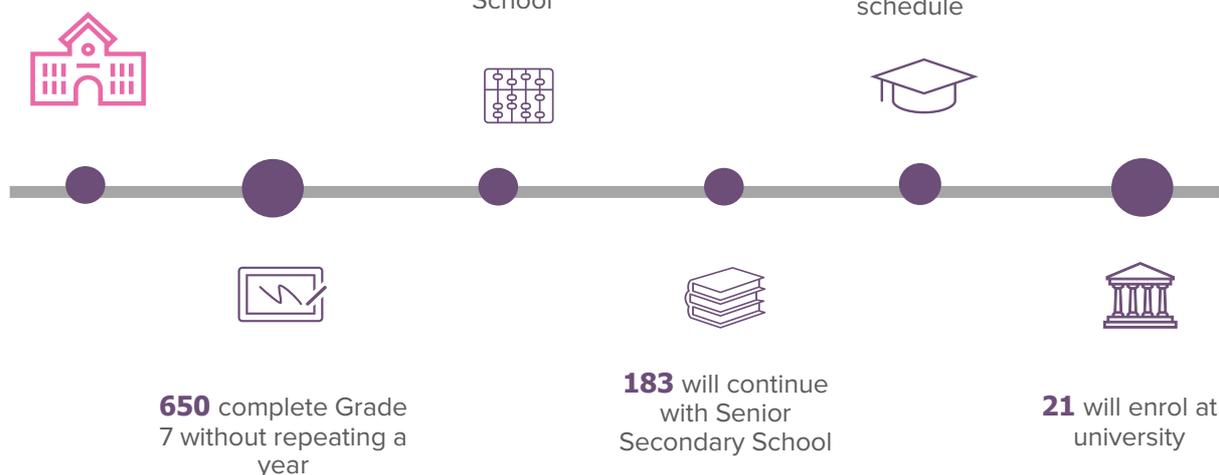
Relation to government:

- must register and renew their registration with the government and pay a fee to do so.
- undertake regular government inspection.
- adopt curriculum, centralized exams, books, and guidelines on teaching material from ministry.

3. EDUCATION SYSTEM: PERFORMANCE AND CHALLENGES

3.1. EFFICIENCY

Out of **1000** students who attend Primary School



3.2. TEACHING AND RESOURCES

Teaching

Student-teacher ratio (average)

Primary Schools

Secondary Schools

43.3

21

36.9

35

Students/teacher

Target

Students/teacher

Target

Qualification



When given the exams of their students, Grade 9 teachers scored **70%** on average.

Teacher Absenteeism



Only **52%** of Teachers are in the classroom during school hours. Less than **40%** prepare a lesson plan.

Learning resources

Student-textbook ratio (average)



For an average subject in primary school, more than 5 students must share one book in primary school and 3 students in secondary school.

Student-toilet ratio (average)



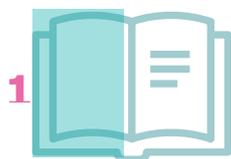
Over 60% of students attend schools that face a severely or extremely low level of material and instructional resources such as drinking water, working toilets, classrooms, or wall charts.

Shortages in resources are significantly related to the socio-economic and regional background with public schools in rural areas most affected by scarcities.

3.3. LEARNING OUTCOMES

Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA/EGMA) - 2015

Reading



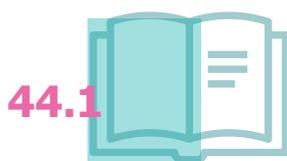
Only **1%** of **Grade 2** students reach the minimum proficiency level in reading set out by the SDGs.

Mathematics

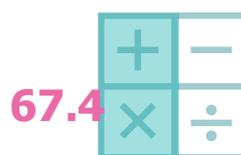


Only **9%** of **Grade 2** students reach the least minimum proficiency level in mathematics set out by the SDGs.

Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SAMEQ) - 2007



44.1% of **Grade 6** students lack basic reading skills.



67.4% of **Grade 6** students lack basic numeric skills.

PISA-D - 2017



5% of students at the **age of 15** achieve the minimum level of proficiency in reading skills.



97.7% of students at the **age of 15** fail to reach the baseline performance level in maths.

3.4. EQUITY

Gender



7.77



9

Mean years of schooling
Performance – PISA-D 2017:

Girls perform better in reading whereas boys perform significantly better in mathematics in all assessment types.

Rural vs Urban



6.86



9.79

Mean years of schooling
Performance – PISA-D 2017:

Urban students are significantly outperforming rural students in all assessments, e.g., students from urban areas are 1 year of schooling ahead of rural students in PISA readings scores. The two urbanized provinces (Copperbelt and Lusaka) consistently outperform others - arguably due to better school resources and higher fluency in English.

Socio-economic

Poorest 20%



5.43

Richest 20%



11.07

Mean years of schooling
Performance – PISA-D 2017:

The socioeconomic background is a key performance predictor in all assessments. This relationship is amplified by the performance variation between public and private schools. PISA-D results show that a student from the bottom quartile is 10 times more likely to perform under the baseline in mathematics and readings than the remaining 75% of students.

4. EDUCATION SYSTEM: TRENDS AND DIRECTION

4.1. PAST TRENDS AND DEVELOPMENTS

Over the past decades, Zambia was able to boost participation in primary education: since the abolition of school fees in primary education in 2002, gross enrolment grew from **73% to 98%**. While enrolment in primary education is high, survival to the last year of primary school is low and scarce capacities in secondary education foreclose further education for many.

The 2013 curriculum reform entailed important changes in Early Childhood Education and vocational skills. Firstly, a standardized curriculum for ECE was introduced that should allow a smooth transition to Grade 1 and that is compulsory to both public and private ECE centers. Degree programs in ECE were introduced to ensure the adequate qualification of teaching staff. Secondly, vocational pathways were introduced to lower and upper secondary education to ensure early options for vocational education.

4.2. POLICY DIRECTION

In 2012 the Zambian government has articulated the vision of becoming a **prosperous middle-income nation by 2030** as a guiding goal for the nation. The Ministry of National Development Planning works towards this goal through 5-year medium-run development plans covering 5 central policy areas including education. The most recent 7th national development plan covers the 2017-2021 period, and the respective education and skill sector plan specifies more detailed policy information for the education sector.

The Zambian government aims to improve the efficiency, quality, access, and equity of the education system. To do so, the most important policy goals are:

- Formalization and further roll-out of **ECE** aiming for a 30% enrollment in 2021
- Increase quality and equity in **primary education**
- Expansion of **secondary education** capacities
- Adequate **qualification of teachers**
- Consistency between **university education and vocational training** outcomes and industry needs

Through the [Zambia Education Enhance Project](#), the MoGE also received 60 Million US dollars in support from the World Bank to improve quality and access to primary and secondary education as well as in enhancing its monitoring and evaluation capacities.

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